



Rants & Randomness with Luvvie Ajayi Jones

Make Your Voice Heard (with Stephanie Young) - Episode 50

Released: **October 13, 2020**

My PEOPLE! Welcome to Rants and Randomness. I'm your host Luvvie Ajayi Jones, New York Times bestselling author, speaker and professional troublemaker, and I'm here to share dope conversations that will give you something to think about, help you smile and feel empowered to do what you feel compelled to do. Let's get into it.

Today's interview is on time and extremely important, and you're going to want to listen and share it with your friends.

My guest is Stephanie L. Young. Stephanie serves as chief officer for culture, communications, and media partnerships at [When We All Vote](#), a nonpartisan voting initiative launched by Michelle Obama. She has years of communication experience in the public and private sectors with organizations such as the Obama White House, where she worked for years, Congressional Leadership, NBCUniversal Cable Entertainment, and BET. During her time in the White House, Stephanie served in two critical roles as associate communications director and then as the senior public engagement advisor. In these roles, she led the press strategy around domestic policy announcements and created and managed critical relationships for the president in the African-American community.

During our conversation, we discover what her childhood was like. She's a global citizen, for sure. We talk about how she started her career, how she was able to get a job at the Obama White House, and what she's doing now that has traces to what she used to do when she was younger. So, let's jump into the interview and stick around.

Before we jump into the interview, I want to make sure the Rants fam knows that my new book, [PROFESSIONAL TROUBLEMAKER: The Fear-Fighter Manual](#) comes out March 2, 2021 and is available for pre-order right now!

I wrote this book because everything great in my life has come as a result of me choosing to be a professional troublemaker. From feeling afraid and choosing to do the scary thing anyway. We don't have to call ourselves fearless, we need to learn to fight the fear and imposter syndrome by feeling it and using it as fuel to become better versions of ourselves. The things I'm talking about in this book will take you from being a fear-hider to a fear-fighter, and heaven knows we got a lot of things that bring up fear right now. So to order it, go to professionaltroublemakerbook.com to learn more and grab the links to pre-order or order it from wherever you get books. I'm so excited for you to read this book. It's lit.

Conversation with Stephanie L. Young

LUVVIE So, Stephanie, what did you want to be when you were growing up?

STEPHANIE I wanted to be an actress. I desired to be on the stage. Was I ever? Not really. I think I might've acted in one play and I thought, "This is my calling." And, yeah, that never happened. I also wanted to be an obstetrician because I loved babies. And I was like, "Well, if I'm delivering babies, I get to hold them." So strange. I never thought I would be here. Let's just put that out there. I wanted to be like an obstetrician or actress or a mom. Those were my goals. Great goals. So, great goals, still. It didn't end up being me. Not at least right now.

LUVVIE Here's the thing is I feel like a lot of us wanted to be very things. I mean, again, failed doctor over here, clearly, didn't happen, so fully understand. So, how were you when you were little? What was little Stephanie like?

STEPHANIE I was that kid that every time my mom went to a parent-teacher conference, it was like, "Stephanie's such a sweet girl, but she talks too much." Or, "I had to move her away from her friend. They can't control themselves. They're always talking." But I was a helper. I genuinely wanted to help people. I remember my elementary school here in Atlanta, there was a couple of kids with disabilities and I would love going to that class so I could push them to lunch and to feed them. And I think it's probably because I was obsessed with babies too. So, I was thinking this is kind of like a mother-child situation but I never wanted anybody to feel like they weren't a part of the group.

STEPHANIE I remember a little Hispanic girl came to our class and this is like... What, in the '90s? So, it wasn't a huge influx of Latinx Americans, at least in Atlanta at that time, and the little girl didn't speak English. Her name was Corina. I did not speak Spanish, but I would definitely count to 10 in Spanish with her as if I was communicating something different or I would just be speaking gibberish or translating for her. That was my role at times. I was the person or the kid trying to help other kids or trying to be in the center of attention. I was a different kid, but I also had a very different childhood, not a typical childhood growing up here in Atlanta, but then also living in South Africa for four years.

LUVVIE So, tell me about that. What made your childhood atypical?

STEPHANIE Well, first, my father was a bishop in the AME church. He was elected and for all y'all who don't know, AME is the African Methodist Episcopal Church. It is the oldest African American denomination, literally the oldest African American organization. So, it's really important to know that, but he was elected a bishop when I was eight years old, and that's kind of atypical. Typically, what happens is that you're elected later on in your career or my parents just had me a little older. They were like 40, 41 when they had me. So, I was a little bit of a special surprise kid. I was the youngest of four girls. So, in '92, when he was elected, his first assignment was South Africa, Namibia, and Angola. So, we lived in Cape Town. We moved there in 1992.

STEPHANIE Obviously, this is before apartheid ended. Nelson Mandela was freed in 1990, and I remember he came to our church here in Atlanta, Big Bethel AME Church. And I got a chance to meet him and Winnie Mandela, not ever thinking that in a couple of years, I'd be living in South Africa. But

we were there for the transition of apartheid to democracy. I went to St Cyprian's Girls School. That's probably the best school I've ever been to besides my college, I'm thinking. And I had such a rich experience there. I boarded when my parents traveled. So, I really was immersed in South African culture in a much different way than I think a kid who may go somewhere and spend six months, but I felt South African. And when I came back to the United States, that was a harder transition to acclimate back into our culture here after spending so much time-

LUVVIE Did you have a South African accent?

STEPHANIE I did. I definitely, had a South African accent. My sister said I would call, and you know how like your register might be a little different in different countries, like they go up at certain times, whereas Americans, we just don't. Either we stay at the same tone, but she said I would call and be like, "Are you well?" And she'd be like, "Am I well? Who is this on the phone?" So, yes, I definitely had a South African accent. I ended up picking up, and I know Afrikaans is the oppressor's language there, but I ended up picking up Afrikaans pretty easily because Cape Town is a huge place for that. But I also learned Xhosa as well in school. So, I was able to understand and be somewhat conversational, more conversational in Afrikaans than I was in Xhosa though. So, yeah, I was a little weird.

LUVVIE So, how old were you when you came back to the US?

STEPHANIE I was 12. My nickname in school was South Africa. That's what they called me. And I remember standing up in the front of the class and my teacher goes, "This is Stephanie. She just moved here from South Africa," and I was like, "I'm from here." She was like, "Oh, okay." So, it definitely was like a different transition and schooling is year-round there. So, I missed most of sixth grade. I did, I think, a couple of weeks of sixth grade there, came back and went straight into the seventh grade because that's kind of how the calendar was. But I never skipped a beat so clearly South African education was a little better than what we have over here, even under apartheid rule.

LUVVIE Can you imagine? That's actually pretty bad.

STEPHANIE It's pretty terrible but that's...It's true. It's true. There was no gaps there for me so I was able to go right into seventh grade, no problems, no issues, besides socially. I figured it out pretty quickly though. But, yeah.

LUVVIE So, how was it socially? Did you have a lot of friends when you came back?

STEPHANIE I guess, no, probably not. I'm thinking there was one girl that moved and we're still best friends to this day. Her name is Jada. She moved from California. I came from South Africa. We were both very strange people at our school but I am true to my talkative, over-friendly probably at times personality. I ended up having a lot of good girlfriends. My mom started a mother and daughter book club because she felt like I wasn't reading enough. So, I had to invite girls from my class in to the book club. So, I had those friends through my mother's relationships as well. And, yeah, I enjoy being a part of the life of whatever institution I'm a part of. Maybe that's why I'm working in the space that I am. But I enjoy being in the mix and a part of things.

So, yeah, I ended up getting some friends after the awkward, you talk like a white girl, you're from Africa, like all of those different, really weird things that kids go through, disparaging you and who you are because you are different and you have a different experience, but obviously I would not change any of this ever. That was such an amazing opportunity for me that I still grow from today. And I was there to witness the first democratic elections and I remember all of the things that my parents helped to put together from voter education, to showing them what the ballot would look like, and here's where you make your mark for who you're voting for, mostly obviously Nelson Mandela. I remember seeing the lines and lines and lines of people voting for the very first time. So that's never stayed away from me ever. And it stayed with me and it actually became more clearer as I've been in this role. And I'm like, "Wow, I really was there and I really was doing voter..."

Well I wasn't. I was sitting there watching my parents do voter education with other leaders in our church there. So it was a huge imprint, which made me understand that this country is great, but it's not the end all be all. There's many other places. There's many other rich cultures. And as Black people, a part of this larger diaspora, I don't think it really matters where you go, you still feel at home. And the connection to the people that I have in South Africa still to this day, it's ever apparent and that will never leave me.

LUVVIE It's wild how the things in our childhood that were there for a reason that we don't realize until much later, it's like it is ordained. That's why I feel I was like, "Nuts. There's very few coincidences because what?" I mean, how perfect could that be to what you're now doing? It could not be any more perfect.

STEPHANIE Yeah, absolutely.

LUVVIE That's wild. So where did you go to school?

STEPHANIE I went to Hampton University. I know other people like to talk about other HUs, but I went to Hampton.

LUVVIE HUs.

STEPHANIE Hampton was actually the only school I ever started and finished at, because my parents moved a lot. One thing I left out was that we came back from South Africa, we were in Atlanta for four years. Did we stay here? No. Yeah, we're at Atlanta four years. And then we moved to Dallas, Texas, which felt like another country. And then I went to Hampton and while I was at Hampton, my parents moved to Florida. So I just feel like I'm a nomad basically.

LUVVIE You are a nomad.

STEPHANIE But Hampton was the first school that I started at and finished at. And that was such an enriching and awesome experience. And I think really prepared me for where I am going to an HBCU teaches you a lot of different things about yourself, but I think most importantly it teaches you how to be really prideful. And I won't say accepting, but completely embracing all of your blackness and looking at that as a positive, that really grounds you and undergirds you and helps you to propel forward.

Obviously, I think there's a wonderful and beautiful HBCU family, but that experience that I had there, I had to learn how to hustle in a way that I don't think I would've learned somewhere else. Not disparaging folks who choose to go to other schools, but it definitely gave me a drive to understand that there's nothing that I can face that I can't really get over. There's a will, there's way. You got to be creative.

LUVVIE So what was your major going in?

STEPHANIE Journalism. Broadcast journalism. My goal was to be a CNN correspondent, White House CNN correspondent. So I thought I wanted to be a journalist after I went to space camp. My mom was obsessed with sending me to really different camps in the summer. So I went to space camp and I was the PR person saying, "Okay, the ship's about to take off and dah, dah, dah, dah." And I was like, "Wow, this is like journalism. I should be a journalist."

And it just stayed with me probably from middle school on. And yeah, I thought I wanted to be a journalist. And I understand how important it is to tell stories and to have different people telling a story, because at the end of the day, it's very hard to speak about things if you have not experienced them. It's hard to even see things if you don't understand them, if you don't have any context. So I wasn't trying to be the next Ida B. Wells or anything, but I definitely thought I could make an impact in journalism and really tell different stories from a different perspective, but really also focus on political issues and political communication. So yeah, I thought I wanted to be a journalist. That didn't work out.

I'd spent about a year doing that at the NewsHour with Jim Lehrer on PBS. When Jim Lehrer was still there and Gwen Ifill was there and I literally was shuffling scripts in a studio with them to make sure they were staying on track and got whatever they needed. And I was able to like help produce a couple really small things, nothing too big. But it was there and I was like, "I can't do this. I cannot be neutral and I cannot be balanced. I must be on a side." And that's right around the time President Obama came on the scene and I remember feeling like wherever this person is going, I need to go.

LUVVIE I need to go with him. You end up working in the Obama White House. How did that happen? So 2000 and... At this point, probably six, because he won presidency in 2008, but that was a long road. How did you end up in that realm?

STEPHANIE Yeah. So from the NewsHour when I was trying to figure out, how do I get into political communications? I just knew I wanted to be a spokesperson for a Senator or something. Right? I hadn't even thought about presidential politics and I had to ask. Okay? I think some people think that there's a magic formula sometimes, but you just got to ask people. You have to have conversations, you have to let people know what want to do. And I talked to my parents first and my dad was really good friends with the mayor of Jacksonville, the first Black mayor of Jacksonville, Florida. That's where they lived. And he told me that there was one person I need to talk to about political communications and this is a Black man and he knows who he is, Jamal Thimons.

And I met up with him and had coffee and I told him, "I want to be in political communications. I don't know how to get there." And he told me about a job opportunity, ironically, with Rock the

Boat, because now [inaudible 00:13:14]. It's so weird. But he told me about an opportunity at Rock the Boat. I went there. I don't know. I was a hot mess. I didn't know what I was doing when it comes to being a spokesperson, but that's where I kind of got an idea of what it looks like. And then I jumped into political communications through the DCCC, which is the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee. There's all of these different stations and places that you can be at that you don't know unless you have these conversations, unless people talk to you about it, or you talk to them about it.

So from there in comms, the thing is, everybody wants to be a spokesperson, everybody wants to be in the record. So I've had a different job every two years. I've never turned anything down that scared me. I actually realized that if it does scare you, you should take it. If it doesn't scare you, you should maybe let it pass and wait for something that's a little bit more challenging. So I took a new job every two years working mostly in congressional leadership with the Congressional Black Caucus, which was a wonderful, amazing ride being their comms director. And then I went on to the Obama Campaign after that in Florida as the deputy communications director for the state, which is the battleground state, which is literally where you learn everything as a communication person, because there's just so much you have to take into account, and to be proactive about, and creative about, and organized about.

So from there, that was my real, real introduction to the Obama world, working in this battleground state. And I went back to the Hill because it was safe, but it was a great opportunity to work with the Democratic whip at the time, who is now the majority of leader, Steny Hoyer as his national press secretary. And I still remember standing under Shirley Chisholm's painting, her portrait, in the capital where I got the call offering me a job at the White House to be associate communications director for the president.

LUVVIE How you even apply for a job at the Obama White House?

STEPHANIE No, you don't. That's the thing. Look, I think that there is something called PPO, which is like a personnel office that's typically at every White House where they're recruiting talent. But I didn't get a call from PPO, I got a call from people that I knew. "Hey, they're looking for this position. They're looking for that position." Well, really also, this is kind of the plot twist here though, is that I interviewed as I was going to be the communications director for Congressional Black Caucus, I interviewed to be a press assistant. I did not care that I was about to be a communications director. I was like, "I want to work in the White house." And Josh Earnest, who was the president's press secretary, said, "You know what? You're in a really good spot. Do well and perhaps you'll come back in another spot." And I was like, I was really, really disappointed. But then I was like, "You know what, I'm going to shake it off. I'm going to be a comms director for the Congressional Black Caucus, right? All of these amazing members. So why am I going to be upset about that?"

Well, fast forward, was it three years later, two years later? I ran into Josh on Capitol Hill and I told him, "Hey Josh, do you remember me?" He was like, "Yeah." Well, I don't know if he actually did. And I was like, "I would love to sit down and talk with you." And he called me over and I had an interview. So it was a little bit of me being aggressive, right?

LUVVIE Yeah.

STEPHANIE Trying to make an impression, ended up making an impression, doing the work where I was. And I think the thing about politics and public service in general is that it isn't about you. And as a staffer, it never is about you. You are seen and maybe you're heard but like... I'm sorry, you're not seen and you are heard, right? So like, you're always kind of in the shadows.

And I say that to say that like self-promotion, pushing yourself out there in certain ways are not okay because it's about the principle, it's about whoever you're working for and representing. So it was very important for you to put your head down and actually do the work. And I really feel like over those years, I did the work, and I put my head down, and I learned, and I built relationships, and I made mistakes, and I grew, and I tried to be creative, and I also tried to be aggressive in those moments where I needed to be. And I know that if I had looked at Josh and the meeting that we were in, walked back to my office, I probably wouldn't be talking to you right now, and I probably wouldn't be in this position. But I said, "Let me say something to him." Not necessarily to make something happen, but just to see. who knows? So I had to put myself out there a little bit and I think that, that's a lesson beyond the White House.

That's a lesson for everybody. You have to put yourself in uncomfortable positions if you do want to do something a little different, and it's not always going to feel good, and that perfect job, doesn't just not drop down from the sky. And the job that I ended up getting at the White House wasn't the one that I originally even was interested in, but it was an even better job. It was an even better opportunity in being the associate communications director. What that means is that I would help to create the rollout plan or the way in which you announce different domestic policy issues. So whatever the president was doing, be that an announcement, be that talking about his new task force for 21st Century policing after the death of Michael Brown. How do you roll all those things out, how do you talk about that to the press in effort to tell the American people what the president is doing and how he is working on your behalf?

So it's a challenging job, right? But it's a job of true organization because not only are you trying to communicate directly with the American people, you also are bringing all of the partners from the community partners to the agencies. Everybody comes to the table and they kind of get in line in how you push out a message. So that job taught me a whole lot, but I got the opportunity of a lifetime to go work on Valerie Jarrett's team about a year into that though.

LUVVIE This drill down about aggression, about being good at where you currently, are about just having conversations and going where it goes because I think people are looking for formulas, right?

STEPHANIE Mm-hmm (affirmative).

LUVVIE And they think like, "How do I do this thing?" It's like a nuanced pot of soup. Like, no one way got you there but all of these different-

STEPHANIE Correct.

LUVVIE ... moves because you were aggressive when you needed to be backed off when you needed to be, and you was like, "You know what? Let me go do my work over here and be really good at it." Because if you are trash at the work you were doing, Josh wouldn't even give you a chance because he'd be like, "I heard about you. No, thank you."

STEPHANIE Yeah, and nobody would give you an opportunity. And I remember Gwen Ifill said to me... So Gwen's father was the presiding elder in the AME Church so we knew her family. And she said to me, "I'll help you try to get an interview," for that first job that I had in DC. She's like, "But after that, you're on your own." And that stuck with me and I could tell she was probably a little uncomfortable because I'm sure you've been in positions where people are like, "Oh, can you please recommend my child for something?" And maybe you do and you're like, "Why did I do that?" Because you're doing a horrible job, and I'm embarrassed for myself and I'm embarrassed for you. But she took a chance. But when she said that, I knew in that moment I had to prove myself, and that was a lesson that I've taken with me throughout my entire career. It's like, once I get in the door, I have to prove why I'm in the door.

LUVVIE Yep.

STEPHANIE And I have to do everything that I can to show that I belong here, I should be here. And I also think as I've gotten older and working with more younger people who are awesome and great, there is a little bit of a sense of like, "I want it all right now. And if it's not happening now, it's not real." And if you're asking me to do something I don't really want to do, I'm not going to really put effort into it. I'm going to just do it in a way that just gets me by. Everybody sees that. Everybody feels that energy. So that's why I think it's so critically important that whatever you commit yourself to, you do it, you do it well, and it will come to you. It might take a little while, but it'll come to you. All that you hope, wish, dream, accolades, whatever, it's going to come. Just work hard.

LUVVIE And there are some positions that, maybe if you got it two years before, you weren't prepared for it, right?

STEPHANIE Absolutely. Yeah.

LUVVIE Right? So if you had gotten it and it went bust in that moment, you would be like, "Shoot!" You won't get a second chance. So a lot of times, we think of denial as like, "I guess my opportunity ... " No, that denial might be a gift to you.

STEPHANIE Absolutely. Absolutely! Take it with a grain of salt and move on and move forward. I can say now in my career, I'm able to be more selective about the things that I want to do. That does not always happen. So that's why you have to be ready to improve yourself, and you have to be ready to work hard, and then you have to take rejection and failure on the chin and keep it moving. Keep it moving. Because it will happen.

LUVVIE It will happen a thousand times. I don't know anybody who ... First of all, actually what's funny is whenever I ask people what they wanted to be when they were growing up, most people ... There's probably maybe a handful of people I've talked to who what they wanted to be was actually what they ended up being.

STEPHANIE Yeah.

LUVVIE That in itself is a form of failure, but not really, because you actually learned where you wanted to go. So you went from associate director of comms to working on Valerie Jarrett's team.

STEPHANIE Yes. That title was technically senior public engagement advisor, but really that job was like the director of African-American outreach, if you want to break it down in layman's terms.

LUVVIE [crosstalk 00:22:47] from Stephanie.

STEPHANIE I was like the liaison between the Black community, the civil rights community, criminal justice reform. I did work with the team on that, but I was that person in between the community and in between the White House, and it was ... The way I got that job was, I think, a little remarkable in a big full-circle moment. Again, as you're kind of climbing the ranks, you have these junior-level staffers, and I was always a junior-level staffer. Which means that, yeah, you might offer an idea here and there, you might get to lead on something occasionally, but ultimately you're reporting up and you're making sure the work is getting done.

My good friend Heather Foster, she had been in the White House for a long time. She was tired, okay? When I tell you, it is more than a notion how hard you work in these positions. I'm talking about you might get there at 7:00, you might leave at 11:00 a couple of days in a row. You probably will come in on Saturday and Sunday so that you don't get too far behind in emails, if you don't have your laptop at home, and it's a lot of security things, so you've got to go in sometimes.

So, if you work really hard, burnout is real. Heather served in that position for a really long time, and when she was deciding to leave, she mentioned to me ... She asked if I would be interested, and I was like ... I had just prayed to God, too, because I was like, "I don't know how much more I want to do of this position." I wasn't ungrateful or anything, don't get me wrong, but I felt like I was ready to do something a little bit more creative, a little different. I kid you not, a week later, Heather called me, and I was like, "Yes! Of course!"

So I interviewed with Valerie, I was completely nervous and crazy in that, and then fast-forward to maybe a couple of days later, the Charleston Nine shooting happened. It's an AME church, and I was literally the only person at the White House who probably, at that point, was an active AME with my father being a bishop in the church. When they were planning for it ... This is another instance where I spoke up. When they were planning for it, for around the service and around the president's role, I was a little like, "Why am I not in the conversations? Why didn't anybody call me and ask me?" And one of my girlfriends, Ashley Etienne, pulled me to the side. She goes, "Girl, if you want to be in the conversations, you need to speak up and say that." I was like, "Oh, I guess you're right."

So I shot an email to Johannes, who was Valerie's chief of staff, and I said, "Look, I'm here to be helpful. I know the church through and through. Lean on me."

LUVVIE Tap me in, coach.

STEPHANIE Yes! Right. I'm ready. He called me and was like, "Okay, we're having a meeting with Valerie in 10 minutes." I came to the meeting, and I was scared in the meeting, because I was like, "Oh my God!" And the way Valerie had her meetings, she would always have chairs around in a circle so everybody could see each other and hear each other, so we're all sitting there, so if you are nervous, you can't play with a pen or anything. You're just in front of everybody.

They mentioned something that I was like, "That won't fly. That won't work." So I spoke up in that moment, even as I was nervous, but I spoke up and I was like, "I don't think that will work, but I'm sure they could work around it in this way or that way. I'm happy to reach out." Then Valerie goes, "Hm, you should go." I was like, "Oh! Okay." So I'm still kind of in the interview process, so I'm like, "I'm about to go to South Carolina."

So I packed up my stuff to go. The entire church was coming, all the bishops were coming, so I knew my parents were going to be there, and my sister and my brother, all these people. I get there and it was a lot of work to do on the ground to make sure this all worked, to be respectful of the family, to really be respectful of the tragedy that we just saw and that we all witnessed. How do you kind of bring these two groups together? I remember in the planning, they would be like, "Is this okay for the church? Okay. Is this okay for the White House?" and I'm like, "Yes." [crosstalk 00:26:40].

LUVVIE Yeah, so you were speaking for both.

STEPHANIE I kind of played those dual roles in that moment, and at the end of the service, President Obama saying ... First of all, he's talked about taking the Confederate flag down, and I think Bill Clinton may have done that one time ... I could be wrong ... but nobody talked about that. And growing up in the south, the Confederate flag, especially in Georgia, it's flying everywhere all the time. You're not going to miss it. It's everywhere. And people argue with you about how it's so relevant to their heritage and culture, but it is obviously a huge symbol of hate and our oppression, and I can't take it. It's so degrading when people dismiss those feelings.

But he talked about taking the Confederate flag down, and that was such a powerful moment, and then he sang Amazing Grace! I was like, "This can't get any better."

LUVVIE I remember that. It was amazing!

STEPHANIE And I was able to, I escorted him and Mrs. Obama out, and Vice President Biden and Dr. Biden out, and Valerie and everybody, made sure they had their seats. I remember coming out and they're singing "Old Ship of Zion," and when we walked out, everybody was like [inaudible] People were screaming at a funeral. They probably shouldn't have been screaming at a funeral over President Obama, but they were. They were so happy to see him, and he served as a symbol of hope and comfort, so I understand all of those emotions. But my dad was sitting right there, and he was looking at me doing all of that, my mom was sitting right there.

Having them in that moment made it feel more full circle, and real. Like I'm doing something. And then when we were back, at the end of the funeral, we were back stage and it was in a gym so we're in this locker room area, where he was signing program, and they were talking to the families individually, I remember I walked Vice President Biden around and I go, "Oh yeah, I'm Stephanie." And he goes, "Oh, I just met your dad." My dad literally was like, "I'm Stephanie's dad." And I'm like, "Daddy, they don't know my name, why are you telling them that?"

But he didn't even introduce himself as a bishop. He's like, "I'm Stephanie's dad." And he did the same thing to the president. But Valerie pulled me to the side and said, "Mr. President, you know Heather's leaving." And he was like, "Oh, yeah, we're sad to see you go." And he gave her

a hug. And she was like, "Oh and Stephanie's taking her position." And I was like, "Oh." He was like, "Steph." And he gave me a hug, and literally I was like what? That's how she told me I got the job. And then she walked me over to meet Mrs. Obama and Mrs. Obama is like, "You know, my family's AME too." And I was like, "Oh, gibber jabber, I don't know what I'm saying right now, it's so great." It was such a surreal moment from such a dark place, but then going to a place of hope after his speech you felt renewed. And that was the same night that the supreme court okayed same sex marriage.

STEPHANIE So it was like from the depths to the heights. It was crazy. It was such a great day. I will never forget that. And I don't know if Valerie even remembers that, but that will obviously stay with me forever, just because it was such a monumental moment.

LUVVIE That sounds like the world's most epic day. Personally, and professionally the world's most epic day. Everything about it was right for you.

STEPHANIE It really was. It really was. You can see God's hand in all of it. What you said earlier is true, everything is happening in order, and in time, and to have that time, especially with my family was so special.

LUVVIE I love that story. So that's how you met Mrs. Obama, and clearly, she fell in love with you. I just remember y'all in the White House being epic in that my inbox was always lit with what the White House was doing to engage Black people to make it the people's house. And South By South Lawn-

STEPHANIE Oh yeah, swag surfing.

LUVVIE ... we cookout of all cookout. South By South Lawn was like ... I remember walking into the White House that day and being like, "I absolutely have to try to drink in every single detail of today, because I know this is beyond significant."

STEPHANIE Yeah, it was. That's the thing I loved too. The fact that we tried to do different things. And shout out to Disha who was-

LUVVIE Disha.

STEPHANIE ... on the cutting edge of pushing the ball forward to have these really inclusive events for everybody, and it was the people's house. I think about the [inaudible 00:31:16] role and how many people we brought in. I think about the last Black History Month. The biggest receptions of all time, the-

LUVVIE Also there for that, because y'all had Morgan States Band playing outside. When I say the White House was so Black-

STEPHANIE It was Tennessee State, Tennessee state.

LUVVIE It was Tennessee State, oh okay. So y'all had Tennessee States band playing.

STEPHANIE You know what, you're right. It was Morgan States Band for that one. Tennessee States Band did the opening of the African American museum. That's the one they did.

LUVVIE Got it. Yeah. Morgan State did the last reception of the White House Black History Month. Y'all were serving Hennessy at the bar. Me, I remember me, David Johns, and Eunique standing by the bar being like, "This is some Black shit. Y'all don't really have unlimited Hennessy, fried chicken, y'all had-"

STEPHANIE Macaroni

LUVVIE Macaroni, it was just unapologetically Black, and we sat there like y'all this is magical. We knew it was magic as it was happening.

STEPHANIE Yeah absolutely. I don't even pinch myself because I do feel like there were times where I was able to do what you were saying. It's just stay in the moment and realize where you are and what you're doing and how significant this will be. And I'm always going to think about the dance event that we did for Black History Month with these little girls. It was my dream to have ... I think Black History Month is usually like I've been buked, and I've been torn. It's always downtrodden, and we're going to help you Black people. And I'm like, "Can we stop that? Can we celebrate being Black?" That's what it's about.

It's not about - yes, let's talk about where we come from, absolutely. Nobody's saying let's not talk about the history, but I think it's so incredibly important to celebrate who we are as a people, and I was like why don't we do a dance event that shows the progression of African Americans. So we can start off with Alvin Ailey doing their dancing, representing our time in this country being enslaved. And we can go over to the Dance Theater of Harlem and show that's reconstruction. We start to get a little bit more access. Now we have you can do ballet and all these things. And then let's also do hip-hop to show where it all ended, the melding of all these things.

I also, actually, I take that back. We started off with African Dance first obviously, with Debbie Allen, she kicked it off with African Dance, and then we went to unfortunately that period of time through Alvin Ailey, and then we went to Virginia Johnson the Dance Theater of Harlem, and then we ended with Fatima Robinson for hip-hop. We had 50 little Black girls, about 51 little Black girls, ages six all the way to 14, and my dream was just to see their little faces dancing in the White House. How free can you be dancing in the White House? We made sure we got some girls that did appreciate dance instead of getting kids that wouldn't really appreciate the moment, but kids who have promise and there could be potential for them to go off and be a part of this art form.

I remember, there was a little girl named Sojourner, which is like of course her name is Sojourner.

LUVVIE Wow, how perfect.

STEPHANIE They called her Sojo, and she was the sweetest little girl. She had to be eight years-old. And there was another little girl, and she had no teeth, no front teeth and when they were dancing

to Alvin Ailey, and you know how they do the movements like this with their hands spread, and they're literally dancing to a very sad song. And she saw Mrs. Obama, and the look on her face was... It makes me teary-eyed thinking about it every time. But I know that that moment will forever live on in their lives.

And we did this little wrap-up video with them where we caught them while they were waiting to perform, and they were sitting there, and they were asking them, "What are you most excited about to be at the White House?" And they were like, "To meet Michelle Obama." And the energy from them, the excitement from them, the hope from them... I know that that will forever be implanted on their lives. And that's what I loved about the Obama White House. It was about the possibility of everybody. It's not the possibility of a few. It's the possibility of us all. So, we're not cutting off opportunities, we're not cutting off a path forward if you mess up. We're literally trying to give everyone an opportunity to be their best self in this country that has promised that... Not for everybody, but for some.

So we're trying to change that. We were actively trying to change it. I won't ever forget that. And I hope that even if people couldn't get there, like you, but I really hope that people felt that. And they felt that coming from the administration because we worked overtime, we worked hard, and we were proud of being Black, and we were proud of doing things with Black people and lifting up Black stories.

- LUVVIE Listen, it was a vibe, which is why we did that Swag Surf because I was like... It was me and two other people who coordinated the Swag Surf. Because we were like [crosstalk 00:36:32]
- STEPHANIE I remember jumping in it, and then I was like, "Uh-oh, I'm at work," and I jumped out. You got to go back and look at the video because somebody has it on video and you can see-
- LUVVIE Oh, no [crosstalk 00:36:40] we have all the video.
- STEPHANIE Okay, yeah. I definitely jumped out. Watch.
- LUVVIE We even coordinated it via Twitter. So, when we decided that we were doing the Swag Surf, we were like, "All right, you know what? Let's do the Swag Surf in 15 minutes."
- STEPHANIE Yeah.
- LUVVIE So, we tweeted. We was like, "Yo, whoever's at South by South Lawn, meet us in front of the sign-"
- STEPHANIE I didn't realize that even happened.
- LUVVIE Oh, absolutely. I was like, "Meet us in front of the sign. We're going to do the Swag Surf." So, somebody's job... I can't remember who it was... was to go convince the DJ to go rogue with us.
- STEPHANIE Yeah.

LUVVIE And DJ sat back. And 30 people Swag Surfed on the lawn of the White House in October 2016. Actually, the anniversary just came up because it came up in my Memories.

STEPHANIE Oh, really?

LUVVIE And somebody reposted and was like, "Oh, man, this was a good time." I was like, "Oh my God. The Blackness." It was so-

STEPHANIE The Blackness. [crosstalk 00:37:25].

LUVVIE The Black excellence was so real.

STEPHANIE It was.

Rants fam – if you haven't joined us in LuvvNation and become a LuvvCousin yet, well, I need to know what you're waiting for. LuvvNation is my free community my free community that is a safe space in a dumpster fire world! [LuvvNation](#) is the place for the most thoughtful, funny, most chill-deficient people on the interwebs. We're a community that comes together to make each other better with curated conversations, opportunities to connect, and challenges to help us transform and do better in every area of our lives. You need to stop sitting on this and come to LuvvNation.com and get signed up. Or download the LuvvNation app in the App Store or on Android and come through that way. Ok – back to the podcast.

LUVVIE So once the administration ended... Again, I'm Forrest Gump, so I consider myself to be Forrest Gump.

STEPHANIE Okay.

LUVVIE Because you know how Forrest Gump ends up in all the random scenes when you're watching the film?

STEPHANIE Yeah.

LUVVIE And you're like, "Oh, Forrest Gump was there when this thing [inaudible 00:37:41]."

STEPHANIE I know. Yeah.

LUVVIE I'm Forrest Gump because-

STEPHANIE Okay.

LUVVIE ... I also was there at the last Christmas party.

STEPHANIE Oh, yes. I remember that. Because you were with Yvonne, right?

LUVVIE Me, Yvonne, Boz

STEPHANIE Issa

LUVVIE Issa.

STEPHANIE Yeah, I remember that.

LUVVIE And we actually ended up staying long enough... We were the last ones there because-

STEPHANIE Yeah.

LUVVIE ... Issa was like, "I'll be back." We ended up watching from the inside their helicopter leave.

STEPHANIE Oh, yeah.

LUVVIE When they were going on vacation.

STEPHANIE Yes.

LUVVIE And me, as this Nigerian-born girl who showed up to this country, it was surreal.

STEPHANIE Yeah.

LUVVIE Because here I am watching... Mind you, and I've also never met President Obama. As Forrest Gump as I am, I've actually also never met him.

STEPHANIE Really?

LUVVIE Never met him.

STEPHANIE Wow. Okay.

LUVVIE So the most random thing. But for you, as the exit was happening, as that time was winding down, how did you try to take it in?

STEPHANIE You're running at a hundred miles per hour, and then to know that you're about to stop, there's relief there a little bit because you're like, "Okay, I am exhausted." But then it's also kind of like... you're like, "Oh my God." It's kind of weird. You may have like imposter syndrome. You're like, "What am I going to do? What can I do? I don't even know what I'm doing. Who am I?" You kind of have that moment.

But I will just say that, obviously, the election was so dark that you were kind of stuck in that. And President Obama had this saying, "We got to run through the tape." So, everything that we've been trying to... We've got to try to get everything done we can get done. This is before the election.... leading up to it. So, we're all trying our hardest to finish things, sprint, whatever we can do on all these things... clemency, this, that. So, we're working on everything. How do we talk about the work that we've done? So, it's kind of this mad dash, and then it's almost like we hit a brick wall.

And I remember I had my favorite intern who was like my fake assistant because I couldn't have an assistant, but my favorite intern, Niat, she came over to my house, and she's super green, and we're watching the election returns. And we had the option to watch it in the West Wing, and I was like, "I can't because..."

LUVVIE That's intense.

STEPHANIE It was just too much anxiety. And I was like, "I don't want to sit there in the room..." I just couldn't do it. So, she was over, my good friend, Crystal, who worked in Cabinet Affairs, is a lawyer, she was over. And we were drinking, and watching, and as things start to get worse and worse, we were just like... Niat was like, "Well, maybe..." We're like, "Shut up, Niat." So, all her little hope, we were like, "Shut up. You don't know what you're talking about. Being quiet." It was literally like hitting a brick wall.

And I think at maybe 2:00 AM, I said, "Okay, I'm going to go to sleep." And then I woke up and I saw the news. Someone texted me probably like at 4:00 AM... Maybe I went to sleep at 1:00 AM. I don't know. I went to sleep late. I saw the news when I woke up at 6:00. And I remember getting in the shower, and just like one of those sad movies when you break up with someone, I was in the shower, crying in the shower. And I remember going in, and literally it was cloudy. It was like the cloudiest of days. I have this picture on my Instagram right now that shows how cloudy it was that day.

And I remember I was in my office, we're all crying. I've never been in a situation where everybody's just crying at work. And we were all just completely devastated and, I think, scared. Just full on scared. Like, "What is really about to happen?" And the president wanted us to come out to the Rose Garden for his speech, and I was like, "I don't know if I want to hear a hope right now. I don't feel it." It was challenging. And I remember CNN did this special on it, and you see it zoom past some of our faces, and they zoom past my face, and I literally look like the world had ended because that's what it kind of felt like in that moment.

But he was hopeful. And when he spoke, no lie, the sun came out and it shined on us.

LUVVIE Wow.

STEPHANIE And when he went back in the Oval Office, it went away again. But the ending was not what you wanted it to be. Because if you put your heart and soul into it, it's very rare that you work with hundreds of people that are all working towards the same goal and are all passionate about seeing this country be and do better. And it just felt like everything was, at that moment, like, "Is all hope lost?" Obviously, it's not. It never was. But we had to feel those feelings, I think, and just

be kind of down. And I didn't even think about what's next in that moment. I was so shocked. I was so shell-shocked. And then I was like, "Oh yeah, girl. You need to get a job."

LUVVIE So wait, did you take a sabbatical after the administration was done?

STEPHANIE No, I wish I did. I did not because working in politics... Okay, so any of your listeners who are interested in working in politics, it doesn't pay any money. So I had spent so much time with my parents helping me, financially. And at that point, I was kind of self-sufficient. But I just wanted to be in a place where I wasn't asking them for anything. And I was like, "They've helped so much. Let me go out there and get something."

I knew I was interested in a cross-section of entertainment, politics, and pop culture. So I had the opportunity to go work with Debra Lee at BET and do corporate communications. And I jumped at that and working corporate, going from the public sector to the private sector is like, you're like, "Oh, this is for me?" I take my nephew, he's like four, to the store. And he's like, "This is mine! This for me!" That's what I felt like. I was like, "This corporate credit card is mine!"

It was really exciting to see kind of how the other side of things worked, but also how much power and influence you can have, not just in the most powerful office in the land, but through culture, and through storytelling, and through content. And there is so much power there. And it's half of the reason, if not all the reason, well half the reason, let's be fair. It's probably half the reason why our country is where it is because all these mediums really help to, not only tell stories, but it helps to push narratives. It helps people be more open to things or more closed off, to trust government or not. So there's all of these strings that can be pulled when it comes to, I would say media, to really push the culture forward. And I knew I wanted to be a part of, "What can we do to help push this culture forward holistically?"

LUVVIE So you are now the chief officer for Culture, Communications & Media Partnerships and [When We All Vote](#). So you basically end up back with the Obamas.

STEPHANIE Yes. I came back.

LUVVIE Did you apply or did you get a phone call?

STEPHANIE I got a phone call. I got a phone call. So my good friend, he calls me up and he's like, "Steph." His name's Kyle. He's like, "Stephanie. I'm about to do this. You've got to come, blah, blah, blah." And I was like, "I don't know, Kyle." At that point I was at NBCUniversal Cable Entertainment, helping to do something like run a program there. I was in New York. I was like, "Eh, I'm kind of content." I like having a weekend and normal days. And then Valerie called me. And I was like, "Okay, never mind, I'm coming."

LUVVIE You can't say no to Valerie.

STEPHANIE You cannot say no to Valerie. But also I saw the initial rollout of it. And he asked me to help on one thing. And I remember being at work and putting a lot of energy into [When We All Vote](#) and no energy into what I was supposed to be doing. And I was like, "Mm, this is fun to me." Maybe I should go over here. And it's a different way for us to communicate about something that I love,

which is politics, and civic engagement, and all of those things. But now we can do it in some really innovative and creative ways. And we don't have the parameters that you might have at a white house or on Capitol Hill and other places.

LUVVIE Yeah, you've all done some really fascinating campaigns and initiatives and leading up to this, another momentous occasion in election. [When We All Vote](#) has been everywhere. You did the couch party with Denise. What part of this position feeds you?

STEPHANIE I would say that our whole mission is to change the culture around voting. And in order to change culture, you have to be in culture. So figuring out how we can be in culture in authentic ways... How can we show up? How can we talk about voting when people are least expecting it? It's not about trying to be gimmicky. It's not about trying to sneak attack and talk about voting, but rather it's... How do we infuse voting into our everyday conversations? That challenge has fed me. Because you've got to be creative and you have to figure out the partners and people that will come to the table and bite.

I'll tell you, when we first started [When We All Vote](#), everybody was like, "Okay, 'Michelle Obama's saying, okay, ' great." They kind of barely knew the name. And to see the transition of not knowing what the organization is to, now you can say, "When We All Vote, it is Michelle Obama's organization," as opposed to Michelle Obama's organization, [When We All Vote](#). I do feel like we're really on our way to see a difference in the way in which we talk and approach voting.

With 47% of Americans voting in 2016, okay? Less than half. Nearly a hundred million people sat out. We have to talk about voting differently in this country. And we have to bring everybody to the table from marketers, to expert communicators, to people that think about these things in different ways. Our government has to catch up with where we are. And [When We All Vote](#) is... Obviously, we're non-partisan, so we're not focused on issues or focused on candidates. We're really just focused on the act of voting. And Mrs. Obama wanted to do that on purpose because she didn't want it to be about this one election or about that one election. It has to be about all of them.

LUVVIE Yeah.

STEPHANIE And it's a big part of the reason why... We're in a country that we might not recognize at times. And that's because a lot of us have fallen victim to feeling and believing that our vote does not count. So the challenge of inspiring people, being a part of culture, and it's the great team that I work with. That is my inspiration on a daily basis, because we're trying to do something different. And I do feel like we're making strides, and we're achieving some small wins and some small victories, hopefully, to feed into a larger one.

LUVVIE Shoot, we will take that. Because I feel like we need all the small wins right now. We need to hoard the small wins.

STEPHANIE We do. We do.

LUVVIE So what gives you hope in this upcoming election?

STEPHANIE I would say the people. I'm confident that people are going to stand up for themselves. I'm confident that people better understand that their voice is literally their power. I think that the civil unrest that we've seen from the continued police violence, the senseless taking of Black lives, the crazy impact of COVID-19. Everybody is in a position now where they can fully see that every position, every government position actually affects their lives. Not just the president, he absolutely does or she absolutely does, but all the way down to your mayor who appoints your police chief, or the sheriff who you actually can elect in some cities or not elect, or the district attorney who becomes that prosecutor who may prosecute the cop or not, or the governor who says COVID is fake or COVID is real. We are in a spot now where we can see, "Whoa, this is mess." And, "Why is it a mess?" And, "Why do we feel like a mess?" And, "What can we all do about it?"

And I think that people are empowered to vote their values in a way that they've never been before. And besides all of the, I think the negative stuff that we've been hearing, the confusion we've been hearing, people are determined, and you can see that each and every day with the number of absentee ballots or vote by mail ballots that Florida's gotten. I mean, there's been a surplus in that. You've already seen the long lines in Virginia for early voting. It's not a game. People know that. People are ready to make their voices heard, and I hope that this is a greater awakening for election seasons to come.

LUVVIE And for people to realize that, "Yeah, we're going to have to vote more than every four years."

STEPHANIE You've got to vote, every election.

LUVVIE You've got to vote, every election. It's not just going to be about every four years, and as people are having the conversation about, "What does liberation look like?" It's going to be like, "Voting and the organizing that's on the ground."

STEPHANIE Right. You take your protests in the streets to the ballot box. That is another form of protest, and I think what really is important is as we think about the people who came before us, like the Black Panther Movement and the Civil Rights Movement, they didn't march without talking about voting, right? They always talked about voting, and I think that it's so important that we still have that in the forefront. I think that there's been a lot of say around, "Well, it doesn't really matter. Maybe we should hold our votes." And what Mrs. Obama likes to say is that democracy moves on with or without you, so either you're in it or you're not. And the thing is that people are going to vote and whoever they put into office, they're not beholden to you and they don't care. Why would they care?

So that's why we have to flex and show our muscle at the ballot box, so that we can hold people accountable and so that people we put into place are working on behalf of the people. All of them and not a select few.

LUVVIE What is the action that you want somebody who is listening to this to take? If they can take one action today.

STEPHANIE Okay. Well, if you're in a state that the voter registration deadline has not passed yet, because they all started in early October, get registered right now.

LUVVIE Yeah.

STEPHANIE And then make sure you get at least two or three of your friends registered. Have that conversation. I'm going to say one other thing too, Luvvie.

LUVVIE Yeah. I'm listening. Go for it.

STEPHANIE Make sure you sign up with [When We All Vote](#) so you can keep up with what's going on. We have a voter resources hub where you can come and you can see who's actually on your ballot. You can request your absentee ballot if you have not done that. Just make a plan to vote early. And when we say make a plan, that means figure out where you're going to vote, figure out what day you're going to do it, put it in your calendar, however you organize your life, and then bring your voting squad with you. All of your friends, your family. Obviously, be careful, wear your mask, be smart. But get ready and go and vote. Do not think about doing it later, don't put it off. If you have a day to do it early, do it early. If you want to vote on Election Day, it's still an option. Bring your snack, bring your battery pack for your phone, be ready. But make your plan to vote and take some time to volunteer with us and join our texting team so you can help other people get to the ballot box.

LUVVIE I'll tell you all what my voting plan is. I am going to go vote in Chicago Loop, early voting, because I think I want to just get it out of the way to make sure I'm not dealing with November 3rd crowds. And November 3rd is not the election, the election is now.

STEPHANIE October.

LUVVIE It just happens to end November 3rd.

STEPHANIE That is correct.

LUVVIE So I'm like, "I want to do my part in advance." So whatever chaos comes close to or after, I've already done and made sure my vote is in there. So it's in my calendar, I have marked off the day. There will be no meetings around that time.

STEPHANIE No meetings.

LUVVIE I'm giving myself hours, and I'm going to carry a little backpack because I've been hearing that the lines are long even for early voting, which I've never seen before.

STEPHANIE Yeah. Exactly.

LUVVIE I've never seen it before.

STEPHANIE That's energy. That is energy. So it's so important that we all prepare. And I know that sometimes when you're a little younger, procrastination is the key to life, but not for voting.

LUVVIE Not for this year. Not this year.

STEPHANIE Yeah. You'll miss out. And do you really want to tell your children, like, 40 years from now that you missed the election because you either forgot to register or you didn't make your plan to vote or you didn't know where to go? That's embarrassing for your life. And your children are going to hold you accountable. When I think about voting, it's not just about you either, it's about everybody else. So when you go in that booth, you're not thinking just about yourself. You're thinking about other people. And we as a country, we as a people have to think and consider others. And that goes to everybody. Sometimes people are selfish when they go in the ballot box, and I really do think it's so critically important that you're prepared. That's why that ballot ready tool is really important on our voter resources hub. That's in voter resources tab on WhenWeAllVote.org where you can see who's on your ballot. But you've got to think about other people, and when you sit home, it affects other people too.

LUVVIE That part. So, I always like to ask people, as you know, you're engaging and living in this dumpster fire world, because it is a trash fire.

STEPHANIE A trash box?

LUVVIE It's a trash fire. It's just garbage.

STEPHANIE Yeah, it is.

LUVVIE What's your self-care? How are you taking care of yourself? And just so you all know, Stephanie's skin, I just, the woman's skin.

STEPHANIE I'm shining. But I'm shining like, "Ew, you're too shiny, you need to blot."

LUVVIE No. Stephanie always gives me skin, always gives me red lip. I'm just like, so clearly she doing something. So yes, what is your self-care game?

STEPHANIE My self-care game. You know, I've added in a couple of things. One, I haven't been really consistent working out. I actually worked out this morning for the first time in about two weeks, two to three weeks, maybe a little longer than that, but that really does give me energy to be positive in the morning. I feel like a better person after I work out. I feel like I can conquer something. And then I have a cup of coffee and then I feel like I'm really on top of the world, and then that fades a little bit in the day. But having that time for myself to actually not think about anything. I know that sometimes when I'm busy, it's hard to not think about work, but just that hour in the morning where you're just focused, you're leaving before dark, and you feel the air or the sunshine. Whatever's happening when you wake up and get out to go, I love that feeling of feeling like I did that for myself, but that I am stronger.

STEPHANIE I also love the... What is it? The Care app? Like the-

LUVVIE Ooh.

STEPHANIE Yeah. That meditation app.

LUVVIE Calm?

STEPHANIE Calm. Jesus, the Care app. Yeah, the Calm app. I love that app. So I don't do it every morning, but I try to do it as much as possible just to center myself. And again, like when I do do it, I'm like, "Thank you God for this message," because it's always relevant to something that's happening in that moment. But the stillness of that is beautiful and I see the impact of just really centering yourself because this world is crazy and we're filled with so much. We have to fight for ourselves right now as well and that is my way of trying to fight for myself. And then, I lost my, my father got really sick at the end of 2018 and passed away January 16th of 2019.

So, I'm still in that grief world and process, the early grief process. I know that it changes and dealing with that is beyond real. And especially during a global pandemic and I'm home with my, I came home to be with my mom in Atlanta and I'm changing light bulbs and I'm killing a bug if I see a spot. I'm doing the stuff that my dad would do. I'm taking the trash down the driveway. And so like, there's not a day or a minute goes by not saying like, "Oh, I don't want to do things you did daddy," but it's just, I'm consistently reminded of his loss right now in a way that I probably would not have been if I was kind of living my, get on the plane, go here everyday life, but you're sitting in it.

STEPHANIE So I do have a therapist.

LUVVIE Amen.

STEPHANIE I do talk to her. I try to do every week in and carve out some time because you need that. And we can't always face everything by ourselves. We don't have the tools to always do that, but thank God we do. Some of us have the resources. So yeah, those are the three things that I try to do consistently. And I'm not going to lie. I do like to eat carbs as well and a lot of them. And now that I-

LUVVIE Carbs is my love language. Okay? Carbs is my love language. I am not sorry about it.

STEPHANIE No, no. And being at home in Atlanta, I mean, I'm going to have some fried fish and some fried this, and so I'm going to do it every now and then. It makes me feel good.

LUVVIE As it should.

STEPHANIE Yeah, yeah.

LUVVIE As it should. Therapy.

STEPHANIE What are you doing?

LUVVIE Oh girl, all that. So first of all, this is how crazy it got for me. I stood up my therapist twice and I was like, "Oh, I'm failing. I'm failing. I got to get it together." So I actually called my therapist last week and I was like, "Okay, I'm sending those calendar invites and booking it out three months in advance and being like, we're going to set this time." And she said, "Okay." So I sent her a calendar invite. So I was like, "Okay, I got to get back to therapy." I have been doing the Bible app, just trying to read it at least once a day, just kind of open it as I'm scrolling through my phone, I'll be like, "You know what? Let me read a verse because..." Get a quick word.

STEPHANIE Yeah, yeah. I need to add that to my list. Yeah.

LUVVIE Yeah. That Bible app. I leave it on my phone's home screen as a way to convict me.

STEPHANIE Yeah. To at least take a look. No, that's good. That's absolutely good. Yeah.

LUVVIE Yeah. It's like, "No." And then I have been, man, I've traveled twice so far one to go visit my mother-in-law for her 70th birthday.

STEPHANIE Okay. Where does she live?

LUVVIE She's in Washington. Maryland.

STEPHANIE Maryland. Okay.

LUVVIE So I got COVID tested, which feels like wasabi is in your brain. It feels like you ate too much wasabi.

STEPHANIE Yeah.

LUVVIE But overall-

STEPHANIE I was tested once. I want to forget it.

LUVVIE And even when we went, we literally stayed in her house. We didn't go anywhere else? We went from airport, her house. Airport, back home. And so for me, moments like that have been good. That's like, "Okay, praise God. Get COVID tested afterwards. But I have been quarantined for real. I'm not seeing people. We have a pod group. Right?"

STEPHANIE Oh, that's so cute.

LUVVIE We have agreed upon pod group.

STEPHANIE So your quarantined friends who can't go out of that?

LUVVIE Yes.

STEPHANIE Yes. Okay. I like that.

LUVVIE Yep. These are the only people who we ever see and we're the only ones they ever see, so what's up? Safe. Cool. And even then most of the time we're outside, if we're doing something. But I think during this time I've just been slowing down, trying to figure out what I need to do that's not going to run ourselves ragged because as you know, a lot of us were used to the getting on the plane life.

STEPHANIE Absolutely.

LUVVIE Constantly. We would see each other.

STEPHANIE I mean, all of our, from Essence to leading women... You're just going, going, going. And this is a, like a, "Scrrr. Stop." And it's also assess. Do you like where you are? Could you go further? Could you reevaluate some people, some things? So this has been an overall great awakening for, I think for a lot of people. And I also think potentially challenging for many who haven't been able to kind of find that balance that you seem to have with what you've been doing in your life too.

LUVVIE Girl, balance is a constant search for balance.

STEPHANIE It is.

LUVVIE Today I might seem balanced. Tomorrow I'll probably be like, "What? Today is definitely not a balanced day." But I think it's definitely showing us and giving us clarity on what the life that we want is when everything is taken away. Right?

STEPHANIE Absolutely.

LUVVIE Thankfully we weren't defining ourselves by how many flights we were taking, because Lord knows I see Stephanie in different states. I don't even know where Stephanie lives. I'm like when I see Stephanie, it's usually in a different state.

STEPHANIE Somewhere else. Absolutely.

LUVVIE Somewhere else and everybody's conferencing and running themselves ragged. So now that everybody's sitting down, my friend, Debbie Brown calls it the divine time out.

STEPHANIE Yes. I love that.

LUVVIE This divine time out. And I think our job is to figure out, so when the timeout is lifted, how are we going to spend our time?

STEPHANIE How are we going to do it? Absolutely. I mean, I basically moved from New York back home, which is challenging, but I put my apartment, I sublet my apartment and I was like, "Let me save some money. Let me assess. Because when this is up, this is not necessarily..." I mean, I had a great apartment. I love in New York, but this is not necessarily where I want to be. So let me do that re-evaluating now. And almost like, let me strip myself down even more in this moment and just surrender and just be open to where you are, which is, you quarantined at home with your mom and you 36, but that's okay. But embrace it because when am I going to have this time with her again? My sister's down the street with my nephews. One just turned four. So it's a little sweet age and I've missed out on so much because we're always running. So, I love that divine timeout.

LUVVIE The divine timeout. So yeah, I'm excited to see what everybody does when the timeout is lifted because I feel like we will all be clear. If we're not clear, we ain't used this time well.

STEPHANIE You're right, you're right. And it's not about how much you can do in this time, it's what can you gain from this time to enrich you?

LUVVIE Yes.

STEPHANIE And I think that people, especially on social media, have been like, "If you're not doing this, you're not ..." I'm like, "Relax, please."

LUVVIE Chill. I don't need this pressure in my life.

STEPHANIE Or that energy. So, stop trying to make people feel like they have to be doing something, but rather everybody needs to take a beat [crosstalk 01:03:03].

LUVVIE And your work is significant, and that's why I was like, "I've got to have Stephanie on."

STEPHANIE Thank you Luvvie.

LUVVIE Because what you all are doing with [When We All Vote](#) is culture shifting, it can change what happens November 3rd, and my hope, y'all, if you're listening to this podcast, listen; don't be listening to my podcast if you're not voting.

STEPHANIE Right, yes.

LUVVIE Don't even. Not at all. I need you to make sure that you are going to be counted, your vote, your voice is going to be counted on November 3rd. So, you go to [whenweallvote.org](#), whole bunch of resources there. Just a lot of resources. Follow the When We All Vote Instagram, because that'll keep you on track on what they're up to. The initiatives have been popping, T. And then Stephanie's of course on the 'gram. We'll put all your links in our show notes. Y'all need to follow Stephanie's work.

STEPHANIE Thank you. I just got verified, and I made the mistake of commenting on someone's page, and then I got all this like, "You're so stupid. You're so dumb." I was like, "Oh, wait. Woops." I forgot I'm not really anonymous.

LUVVIE Incognegro no more, you're not incognegro no more.

STEPHANIE Yeah, because I was just saying my opinion. Never do that again.

LUVVIE Listen, because the verified comments goes to the top.

STEPHANIE I didn't know that.

LUVVIE Oh, girl.

STEPHANIE I did not know that. Nobody's schooled me on that, okay?

LUVVIE Listen, your stuff becomes amplified. So, whether you're making a random statement or not, they're going to be like, "Mm, we seent it."

STEPHANIE They are, they are. Well, thank you Luvvie, I'm super proud of you and all that you've been able to do, and using your authentic voice and the way in which you do it, because I've seen first-hand how much of an impact you have on women, Black women, and it's so important. So, I don't have to encourage you, I know that you're encouraged, but I'm super proud of all that you're doing.

LUVVIE Appreciate you, boo. Yes, and thank you for joining me on Rants..

Okay. Yo, Stephanie Young was amazing. She is an incredible communication specialist. She's an incredible black woman, and I'm so excited to hear her story. Be sure to follow [When We All Vote](#) on social media, y'all. They are [@whenweallvote on Instagram](#) and [Twitter](#), Stephanie is [@SLynnYoung](#). that's S-L-Y-N-N-Y-O-U-N-G on Instagram. But honestly, the most important thing that you can do is to make a plan to vote and make sure you vote this election and the others after it are significant. This is a major way to have our voices heard. We must protest and also make sure that our voices are heard in the ballot box.

Much love to Chicago Recording Company who I've been partnering with from the start of this podcast, and they've been such a huge help putting my recordings from home together and making this sound on point.

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As always, follow me on social media. I'm [@Luvvie](#) everywhere.